



RIO+20
United Nations Conference
on Sustainable Development

Rio+20 side event

The need for a rights-based approach to sustainable development governance

Time and venue Thursday 14 June 2012, 11:30 - 13:00
RioCentro room T-9



Introduction

The side event will focus on the normative reference base for a human rights-based approach to sustainable development governance and make suggestions for required institutional settings and legislation. Normative considerations will be enriched with critical policy analysis and intelligence drawn from the practices the contributing organisations are undertaking in their various action fields. These practices reach from grass-root level work with indigenous communities over policy and law related research and outreach to critical philosophy on global ethics (and back). The event will stage six contributions and organise interactive discussion with participants on issues related to human equality and sustainable development. Based on the contributions and the discussion, a joint reflection document will be prepared as information for civil society and as input towards and beyond the official Rio+20 conference.

Speakers

Paul Quintos

IBON International, Philippines, <http://www.iboninternational.org/>

Marcos Orellana

The Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL), US, <http://www.ciel.org/>

Uchita de Zoysa

The Centre for Environment and Development (CED), Sri Lanka,
<http://centreforenvironmentdevelopment.blogspot.com/>

Nathalie van Haren

Both ENDS, The Netherlands, <http://www.bothends.org/>

Shamina De Gonzaga

The World Council of Peoples for the United Nations (WCPUN), US, <http://wcpun.org/>

Gaston Meskens

The Centre for Ethics and Value Inquiry (CEVI), University of Ghent , Belgium,
<http://www.cevi-globalethics.ugent.be/>

Contact

Gaston Meskens, CEVI, +32 473 97 50 72, gaston.meskens@theacademia.org



Summaries

Paul Quintos of **IBON International** will discuss the importance of a rights-based approach to sustainable development and contrast this approach with the approach taken by the MDGs. He will comment on the role of rights in the outcome document of Rio+20, especially in relation to SDGs and conclude with proposals for a post-Rio+20 process towards a post-2015 development agenda. In all these points, the role of civil society and multi-stakeholder processes will be especially emphasised.

Marcos Orellana of **The Centre for International Environmental Law** will argue that addressing the challenge of integration in Rio+20 cannot ignore the efforts at integration of human rights and environment in the context of sustainable development, as those linkages have become increasingly established in international law. Similarly, effective implementation of Rio+20 depends on a rights-based approach to sustainable development. For example, effective environmental governance systems rest upon core precepts that have been elaborated by the procedural dimension of the human rights and environment linkage. Rio+20 should thus explicitly recognize that every person has the right to a healthy and sustaining environment, that is an environment capable of supporting human society and the enjoyment of human rights. Implementation of the right to a healthy environment should form part of the mandate of the Ombudsman for Future Generations and of a new and strengthened environmental organization.

Uchita de Zoysa of **The Centre for Environment and Development** will emphasise the importance of Peoples Sustainability Treaties. Eventual failure of the official process at Rio+20 should not become an obstacle for a global movement to lead the transition towards sustainable futures. Civil society organisations shall not make a historical mistake of simply being reactive to a weak international agenda on sustainable development; they need to assume their rightful place in global citizenry and provide the vision, leadership, and commitment towards reinforcing a strong agenda and action plan to forge ahead in a transition towards sustainable futures for all, including both humans and biodiversity. The treaties are essentially a forward looking process. They target a future beyond Rio+20 and will become a living document towards the transition to a sustainable world.

Nathalie van Haren of **Both ENDS** will argue that the Rio principles from 1992 are valid and still very up-to-date and that the international community has come even further in its thinking about the interdependence between human rights and natural resource management by recognizing the right to food and the right to water. The challenge now is not to produce a new Rio declaration, but to put those principles in practice and to learn from each other. In Rio, we need to take this process one step forward and engage in a post Rio commitment that puts people at the centre of interest, accepts that plans that lead to pre-determined results with high levels of certainty do not exist and allows good practices to flourish.

Based on her experience with diverse projects through **The World Council of Peoples for the United Nations** and her chairmanship of the UNDP/NGO Conference on Human Rights, **Shamina De Gonzaga** will focus on concrete ways in which organizations can effectively integrate a rights-based approach and a social justice component in their sustainable development work, and conversely on the importance of human rights organizations including a sustainable development focus in their work. She will also address the issue of media and communication in that context - how the vocabulary and dominant media surrounding both sustainable development and human rights can either engage or alienate, depending on the audience, and highlight approaches that can render the intersection between rights and sustainable development accessible and relevant to the broader public beyond the sphere of engaged civil society / experts.

Gaston Meskens of **The Centre for Ethics and Value Inquiry** will argue that equity in the context of sustainable development is not only about equal access to basic needs and justice, but also about equal access to policy-supportive knowledge generation and decision making. He motivates this from the critical-philosophical view that global challenges are essentially cases of moral pluralism (that is: even if we would all agree on the knowledge base of a problem, opinions could still differ on the acceptability of solutions; science can inform us about the character of options, it cannot clarify the choice to make). Moral pluralism forces us to engage in inclusive processes of dialogue and decision making and provides thus an ethical-pragmatic argument for equity in addition to the arguments of solidarity and justice.
